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JARS  
By the Rookwood Pottery Company

### LATTER-DAY DEVELOPMENTS IN AMERICAN POTTERY—III

Reference was made in the first article of this series to the fact that but a comparatively few years ago it was fatal for an American potter to let the public know that his ware was a home product. The legend "Made in America" was regarded by connoisseurs and collectors as a published advertisement of lack of value. It was the Rookwood pottery that first demonstrated in this country that a purely American art product, characterized by originality and conscientious purpose, and above all, kept free from the taint of mere commercialism, could command the appreciation and hold the patronage of the American public.

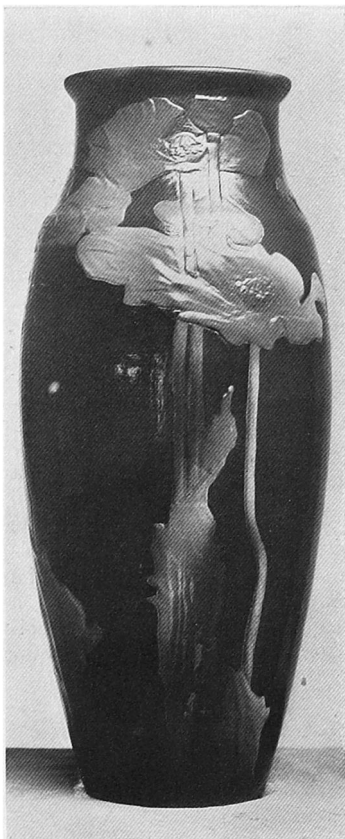
As early as 1893 Edwin Atlee Barber, in his comprehensive history of American pottery and porcelain, said that it was safe to assert that no ceramic establishment which had existed in the United States up to that time, had come nearer fulfilling the requirements of a distinctive American institution than the Rookwood pottery of Cincinnati. The words were not ill-advisedly spoken, and it should be said, to the credit of the leading spirits in the establishment, that the prestige which its ware had then acquired has been fully maintained during the last decade.

The managers of the enterprise have ever essayed to be leaders in the development of native fictile art, having shown commendable taste in devising new and graceful forms of decoration, and in modifying and perfecting the colorings and glazes used. Any account, therefore, of latter-day developments in American pottery must of

necessity include the story and achievements of the Rookwood pottery, which are of more than passing interest.

Really, this establishment cannot be classed with those of recent origin, since it dates back to 1880, when Mrs. Maria Longworth Nichols (afterwards Mrs. Bellamy Storer), inspired by the remarkable ceramic display of Japan at the Centennial Exposition, decided to build a pottery of her own, and do what she could toward bringing American ware to something approximating the standard of the beautiful products she had seen at Philadelphia. A woman of refined taste, an ardent experimentalist, and a most enthusiastic potter, and what was no less to the purpose, a person possessed of ample means, she began her work in Cincinnati, in an establishment which she called Rookwood, borrowing the name from her childhood home, and soon gathered about herself a body of able artists and skilled workmen. Her first kiln of ware was fired in November of 1880.

It was perhaps only natural that her first efforts should have been directed toward improving the ordinary ware of commerce, such as breakfast and dinner services, pitchers, wine-coolers, and so forth, quantities of which were turned out, some in ivory finish and some daintily decorated with underglaze prints of birds, fishes, and animal subjects. These first products are now scarce and are eagerly sought for by collectors.



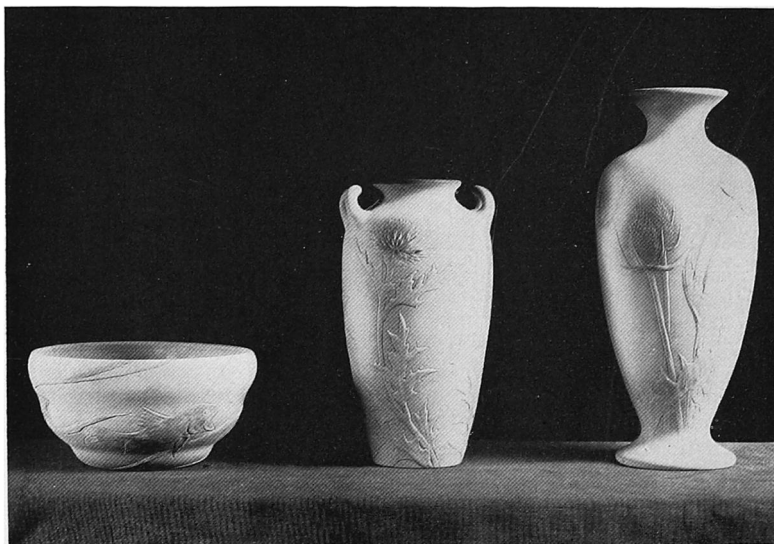
VASE

By the Rookwood Pottery Company

As might naturally be expected, a person as earnest and enthusiastic as Mrs. Nichols could not long remain content to devote her energies to the ordinary ware of commerce. Scarcely had she gotten the manufacture of commercial ware under way than she began the work of producing pieces of pottery whose specific function was designed to be decorative, following closely the unique designs fur-

nished her by the Japanese workers. In these efforts she was ably seconded by a number of clever artists, and especially by W. W. Taylor, who became a partner with her in the enterprise in 1883 and has since remained as its active manager.

It was but a short and natural step from putting blue and brown prints of birds, fishes, and animals under the glaze to means of decoration more artistic and individual. Gradually the use of printing processes was abandoned, and the decorations were done by hand. Then

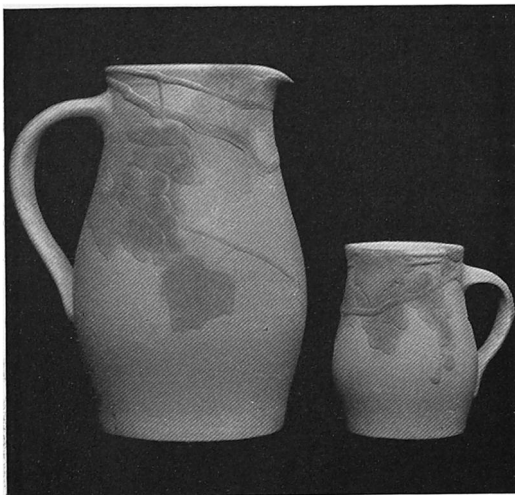


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the practice of the copyist was discountenanced, and Mrs. Nichols and her associates essayed boldly to make their own designs and elaborate their own artistic schemes of decoration. The workers thus early recognized the truth of the dictum that it is the presence of qualities, not the absence of faults, that gives value to a work of art, and they endeavored to impart to their ware a character of its own. One of the Rookwood potters has explained the policy pursued as follows:

"The seed germ was simple and primitive, free from tendency to follow established types of pottery. It was the primeval clay-working instinct to make pottery—but not this ware or that ware. Kiln after kiln brought experiences, and with them knowledge of the possibilities of the materials at hand. Little by little the capabilities



PITCHERS

By the Rookwood Pottery Company

of American clays were in part mastered, and the limitations of the process of slip decoration on the raw clay were ascertained. Gradually one aim and then another was dropped, and the main tendency of Rookwood asserted itself.

"The plant strove upward, gaining strength from concentration upon the 'blind purpose'—felt rather than known.

Finally came the perfect fruit, fresh and new to the world's ceramics. And the key to its peculiar success lies in this development by growth. We may get a technically perfect and very interesting result by a combination of beautiful qualities selected from various wares, but there will be no artistic vitality without the presence somewhere of a character germ to fuse all together. Thus, imitation, no matter how close, fails. Rookwood has met its own problems from the beginning, taking all the help it could from previous experience, but growing from its own root, nourished in our native soil."

The words just quoted express succinctly and clearly the whole principle involved in the development of the Rookwood pottery. The value of hand-work in artistic productions was emphasized, and the use of molds was, for the most part, early put under ban. The clay, of course, is prepared by machinery, but beyond this, no machinery is admitted into the establishment. The workmen of the factory are all specially trained, and every piece of pottery turned out is thrown upon the wheel, since this form of production gives more freedom and results in greater variety as regards the outlines of the vessels. One exception, indeed, should be mentioned, for in the production of certain standard forms such as pitchers, tea-pots, and the like, the same casting method is followed that was discovered at Tournay, France, in 1784. In the manufacture of these pieces, the liquid clay or slip is poured into a mold, where it is allowed to remain a few minutes, until the plaster has absorbed the moisture from the

parts in contact. A thin shell of uniform thickness is thus made which adheres to the mold after the liquid clay has been poured out, thus forming the basis of the article.

Side by side with these efforts to produce individual shapes and styles of decoration, costly experiments were made with the different bodies or clays that lent themselves to the potter's use. It is a well-known fact that vitrification in the process of firing tends to injure the quality of the underglaze colors, and that the resulting impairment of beauty varies greatly with the different clays employed. The Rookwood workers sought to discover a medium that could be fired with the least possible damage to the painted decoration.

Clays of various colors and clays artificially tinted were tried, and finally different bodies were secured that would give satisfactory results. The clays used by the concern are found mainly in the Ohio Valley. A red variety is secured from Buena Vista, Ohio, a yellow material from Hanging Rock, Ohio, and a white or cream-colored clay from Chattanooga, Tennessee.

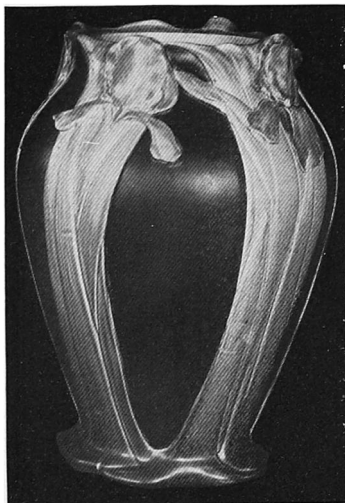
By the employment of these different bodies variety has been secured, and these rich native clays have rather tended to influence the schemes of decoration. The materials themselves being inclined toward yellows, browns, and reds, the decorative medium lent itself to a rather luxuriant style of ornament in rich arrangements of warm color. The potter's art has been directed toward merging the color of the native clays and the tints of the underglazed painting in a rich mellow tone. To quote again from a Rookwood potter, whose enthusiasm and pride are doubtless warranted by the quality of the output:

"As the command of material has strengthened,



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the beauty of the ware has steadily gained in a harmony of all the elements which compose it until form, color, decoration, and glaze combine to produce those things of beauty which are Rookwood in its vital being. Just what is that spark of life evades analysis. It is that in art which one feels without defining. It would be an error to infer that Rookwood is limited to a warm yellow or red tone, for even dark pieces have often been relieved with deep rich greens and blues, and there has latterly developed an important series of light arrangements in pale blue and translucent greens and some fiery single color reds. But in each of these we find the same mellow tone, the same brilliant glaze, as pleasant to the touch as to the eye."



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The Rookwood workers long since abandoned overglaze decorations and now adhere strictly to underglaze painting. The artists employed for this work are, for the most part, people who have been carefully educated at the art schools of Cincinnati. The original founder of the enterprise long since withdrew from the pottery, but the spirit that animated her during the early years of the Rookwood ware has abided with those who remained in the establishment. For the first nine years of its existence the pottery was run at a financial loss, but in 1889 the last indebtedness was paid off and the business was recognized as a financial success. There being no longer need of bolstering

by pecuniary aid, the original founder turned the pottery over to Mr. Taylor and left him to continue the work which she had begun.

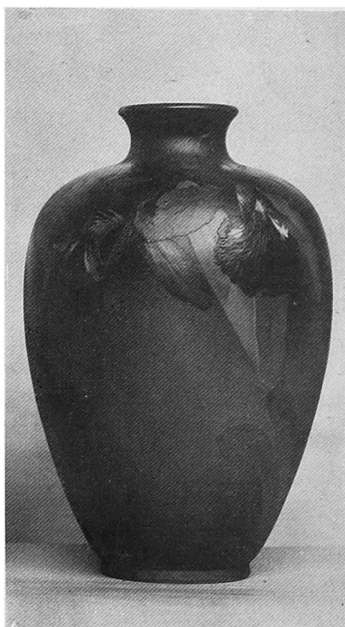
Under his skilful management a number of especially beautiful finishes have been developed, as for instance, "Tiger Eye," which takes its name from a strange luminosity of the glaze; "Goldstone," an effect resembling the glistening of golden particles in aventurine, but rather more limpid by reason of the glaze; "Aerial Blue," a delicate monochromatic ware with a quiet decoration in celestial blue on a cool grayish white ground; "Iris," a class of effects with a considerable range of color—pinks, blues, greens, creamy whites, and yellows—based upon a warm gray tone; and "Sea Green," a light-colored decoration varying from a mellow opalescent sea-green relieved by a few glowing warm touches, to a cooler green with bluish accents.

In addition to these is the wide range of solid color pieces which have likewise undergone a gradual improvement. Some of these are of the richest and deepest reds and browns. Others are covered with feathery mottlings, one color playing through another. Some are combinations of gray-greens and browns, and some are of brilliant red.

One radical departure is the development of a dull finish or matt glaze in place of the brilliant glazes which formerly were regarded as the distinguishing and most characteristic feature of the Rookwood pottery. Many lovers of artistic ware dislike brilliant glazes and successful efforts were made by the Rookwood workers to meet popular taste and produce a soft lusterless surface delicate of texture and velvety to the touch. This innovation, to many connoisseurs, greatly enhances the artistic beauty of the product. Another novelty of recent introduction is the use of metal mountings in bronze or silver in such a way that these mountings are thoroughly incorporated with the body of the ware and thus present more the appearance of metallic glaze over protecting portions of the design than the incorporation of the foreign substance. The metal used is always in harmony with the spirit of the piece decorated, and the work is done on the theory that metal mountings, if used at all, should be an essential part of the article and should conform in every particular to the design of the piece.

The Rookwood pottery has not been without its honors and its eulogists, nor has it been overlooked by the world's great collectors of ceramics. It has won prizes and medals, and is to-day represented in many of the great fictile art collections in this country and the Old World. As voicing the eulogy commanded by the ware, one may quote in conclusion a few words from Charles Dudley Warner:

"The Rookwood pottery," said he, "is the only pottery in this country in which the instinct of beauty is paramount to the desire of profit. Here (in Cincinnati), for a series of years experiments have been going on with clays and glazing, in regard to form and color,



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and in decoration purely for effect, which have resulted in pieces of marvelous interest and beauty. The effort has always been to satisfy a refined sense rather than to cater to a vicious taste, or one for startling effects already formed. I mean, that the effort has not been to suit the taste of the market, but to raise that taste. The result is some of the most exquisite work in texture and color anywhere to be found."

Many another tribute to the beauty and high quality of the ware might be cited, but these few words from Warner will suffice. Comment on the ware is practically unanimous in praise of its finish and decorative schemes, and one commendation is as good as many.

WALTER ELLSWORTH GRAY.



ON THE GREAT ROAD—THE RETREAT  
By Vassili Verestchagin

## AN APPRECIATION OF VERESTCHAGIN'S ART

There is but one Verestchagin. He is one of the greatest and bravest artists of the world. His genius has rendered obsolete all the battle scenes ever painted by his predecessors, and his genius in this direction lies partly in the ethical insight that enables him to see things as they are on the battle-field, and partly in the integrity as an artist that gives him courage to paint things as he sees them.

To those who were permitted to study the marvelous exhibit Verestchagin made in America in 1889, there is necessarily something of an anticlimax in the exhibit he makes this year. We miss the shock, the surprise, the startling revelation that comes to the soul